

*Hon. L. C. Phillips with the
respects of N. Silsbee*

TIMES OF BIRTH AND DEATH THE APPOINTMENT
AND ORDERING OF GOD:

A

SERMON

DELIVERED IN THE EAST CHURCH IN SALEM, JULY 21, 1850,

On Occasion of the Death

OF

PRESIDENT TAYLOR,

JULY 10, 1850;

And of the Death

OF THE

HON. NATHANIEL SILSBEE,

JULY 14, 1850.

BY JAMES FLINT, D. D.,

PASTOR OF THE EAST SOCIETY IN SALEM.

Printed by request of the Family of Mr. SILSBEE, for private distribution among
the Relatives and Friends of the deceased.

Salem:

PRINTED AT THE OBSERVER OFFICE.

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S E R M O N .

ECCLESIASTES, iii. CLAUSE OF 2D VERSE.....A TIME TO BE BORN
AND A TIME TO DIE.

THE unceasing and uncontrollable agency of the Creator, Upholder and Ruler of the Universe is apparent in the continuance, in all the motions, changes and phenomena, which we witness in the great frame-work of nature, in all surrounding objects, of which our minds have cognizance through the several senses, with which we are endowed. By some mysterious arrangement of the divine Providence there is a sphere assigned to human agency, in which the human agent feels that he acts freely, and that he is responsible for the good or bad motives, the right or wrong ends, honest or dishonest intentions, which characterize his aims and actings. *There are many devices in the heart of man*; and he has power, to a certain extent, over material substances to change their forms, to render their properties and powers subservient to his uses,—to develop the latent energies and subject to his will some of the subtlest elements and most powerful agents of nature. He exercises, however, only a dependent and very limited power. Events, the duration, the fortunate or disastrous incidents of his earthly life, are beyond his control. These

are subject to an agency above him. He cannot change any established law of nature,—cannot, i. e. alter any purpose of the divine mind, or any of the processes or modes of action, which God prescribes and to which he adheres in administering his government of the universe of matter and of mind. All the purposes and methods of proceeding in the divine government, alike in the physical and moral world are determined and ordered in perfect wisdom and infinite goodness, and are carried into effect by uncontrollable power. *He doth his pleasure among the hosts of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth.* Of his counsel it is said, *It shall stand.* *He is of one mind; who can turn him?* He has ordained that we should come into the world, weak, helpless and ignorant,—for a long time wholly dependent upon the succor, care and kindness of those, on whom affection, or duty has devolved the office of sustaining and cherishing us. We are removed from the world by early disease, or what we call casualty; or we survive and attain to a certain point of maturity and vigor of mind and body, beyond which God has ordained that there should be a gradual decline, and that to every one that lives there should, as certainly as there came *a time to be born*, come also *a time to die*. Though there be, in respect to the time and manner of their departure an inexplicable diversity, and for the most part, after reaching the age of reflection, a fearfully felt uncertainty, yet to all that come into life, sooner or later comes that important moment, when *the silver cord must be loosed, and the golden bowl broken at the fountain*,—when *the dust*, of which the body is so fearfully and wonderfully composed, *must return to the earth, as it was, and when the spirit must return to God who gave it.*

In no event perhaps of the divine providence is the sovereignty of God, so striking, so unquestionable, so solemn and impressive, as that in the death and removal of his human offspring out of this world into the invisible spiritual world. *Behold he taketh away; who can hinder him?* He brings this event to pass in ways and by means, which none can foresee, or could prevent, if foreseen. The term, or period of duration, assigned to the life of the countless millions of the different individuals of our race, differs from a moment through all the possible divisions of time up to more than a century. And the mystery is beyond human solution, that so small a portion of the millions, that are continually being born into life, should attain to an age of reason and capacity to know the Author of their being—and that the proportion should be still smaller of those, who arrive at full maturity of physical and mental development,—that, in short, such countless myriads should come into the world immediately to go out again,—should be born only to breathe for a moment, an hour, a day, or some larger division of the age of infancy and childhood, and then to die. And, then, of those, who survive the period of infancy and childhood, to all of whom there comes *a time to die*, the measure of their days and the manner of their exit are as diversified, as are their variously diversified lot and circumstances in life, every one of which is dissimilar from the rest. This diversity, as I have said, appears to our short-sighted vision inexplicable. We can see no reason why every life, when commenced with apparently as good constitution, and continued under as favorable circumstances as another, should not be prolonged to a good old age, as well as the few that reach to this full

measure of years. This diversity does not appear to result from any known laws pertaining to growth and decay, which determine the duration of life in a tree, or the different species of animals. It would seem a matter of chance, as much as the diversity in the conditions and fortunes of the different individuals, the duration of whose lives is so various. But we know chance is excluded the moment we admit the existence and agency of an Almighty and omniscient Being, *who worketh all in all after the counsels of his own will.*

As a generation must in a given time be removed out of the world to make room for another, as we see in perpetual succession, this removal must be directed by the same divine agency, by which existence is begun in this world. We know that it is by no volition of our own that we begin to live. It is by no volition of our own,—wilful self-destruction excepted,—that we die or cease to live in this world. Therefore, as for every one that is born there comes *a time to die*; that time must be by the appointment of the Being, by whom we live and by whom we die. *Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth?* was a question asked of old. The fact is implied in the very question. So death is viewed from beginning to the end of the Scriptures. Life, its duration, and its end here are alike determined and dispensed by God. It is not given to man to know his time to die, and when the infant begins to breathe, it is known only to God, how long it shall continue to breathe. And when death comes to remove the child, the youth, or the more mature, it comes when it should come, no sooner,—no later,—being wisely and mercifully sent by God, from whom all things proceed, without

whom, there would be neither life, time, nor death, only a blank and void eternity. Cases, we know are continually occurring, of the termination and of the continuance of life, in which the wisdom or the mercy cannot be discerned by man. No man can know what shall be on the morrow, or whether it is best for any one to live on or to die. God, whose ways are not as our ways, and who seeth not as man seeth, has reasons for continuing or terminating life, as he does, which cannot be seen or known by any finite mind. No one lives on,—no one dies, but it is best for the one to live,—for the other to die. This is apparent to us, so long as we can perceive the good enjoyed or done by the individual, who continues to live. But when we can see neither good enjoyed or done by this individual, prolongation of life seems a wrong and a cruelty. So in the death of another, whose life seemed only a prolongation of happiness, to himself and of widely extended good and happiness to others,—to his family, to friends,—to the community,—to a nation. We speak of the continuance of life in the one case, and of the sudden termination of life in the other, as mysterious providences. Of the one we say, the sooner he is relieved from his sufferings and weariness of life, the more welcome and merciful the message of death, that comes to call him away. Of the other, we say, how is the wisdom or the mercy of God discernable in taking away the still active, energetic, useful and important citizen, who was happy in the confidence and esteem of all who knew him, very dear to many hearts, that are wounded near to breaking by his sudden decease, on whom were devolved cares and responsibilities, and on whom rested interests and hopes, which none other seemed

so fitted to sustain, and to prove how well it was that such responsibilities, such interests and hopes rested upon him. In the one case we say, it is well, it is mercy, that the weary and suffering pilgrim is taken to his rest. And well it is; and it is seen and felt to be a mercy by the survivors, that loved best, and had best reasons for loving the deceased. In the sudden removal of the other, we see only a dark, and seemingly frowning providence. So many sanguine expectations are disappointed,—so many bright prospects are enveloped in clouds,—so many interests, that were thought secure, are put to hazzard;—not only the reasonable hopes, but the very bread and sustenance of many depended upon the life that has been so unexpectedly cut off. Yet, if we could see, as God sees, we should see that there has been equal wisdom, equal mercy in the decease of the one and the other. We can not doubt that it is well for both, whatever the issues and bearings may be to survivors, whether in a limited or more expanded circle.

God sees not as man sees. The vision of man is limited to the present, the visible, and the transient. God, who is the author and dispenser of life, its duration, and its termination in time, and what is to follow in eternity, surveys in his all-comprehending vision, the whole existence of every soul, he creates or causes to exist. As all souls are his, and as He gives being to all, He assigns to all the times and changes, so diverse and so various, which He dispenses to all. The existence of each and all is a gift of love emanating from himself, the infinite source of being, who is love. We can easily see, since all souls are destined to immortality, how blessed the allotment must be to infants and little children to be taken to the heavenly

world, before they have known the pains, the sins, or fears of death, incident to all, who live to riper years. If to those, who are continued here through the various stages of youth, and maturer life, even to old age, it may seem, as if the Father of all spirits were partial and more loving to the souls he takes to himself in their innocence, than to others, who have to live here and to labor, alternately to rejoice and to mourn, and to suffer often quite as much as they enjoy, sometimes more. It should be remembered that He does no wrong to those, whose life he protracts here, in taking the untried innocent to himself, since neither the one nor the other have any claim for existence at all. If those, who are left here to experience, for a longer or shorter period, the usually painful discipline and *sore travail of life*, were to complain, as did the men who labored all day, to the owner of the vineyard, because he gave as much to those who had not like themselves, borne the heat and burden of the day, the same reply might be made by the Author of existence, *is thine eye evil because I am good?* Shall we, who live to labor and suffer here, envy the happiness of those, whom in their innocence, the loving Father of all souls takes to heaven before they have known the pains or sorrows of earth?

But, then, as *a time to die* must come to all, who live to become responsible, i. e. free moral agents here, the variously allotted periods of trial and discipline, some very brief, others a little longer, ending at every stage of life, from early youth to the extremest old age, God only sees or can see how long and in what measure or kind it is best that each individual should be subjected to the discipline, which all must undergo so long as they continue to live in

a mortal body. Those who are taken early away are often taken in mercy from the evil to come, so saith the Scripture. They might either become worse, or more wretched, if their beginning were bad, and the discipline of earth, God sees, had better be exchanged for that of eternity. They might be early good and ripe for a higher sphere, and might have degenerated if life were prolonged. In every view, there might be good reason for the saying of the ancient sage, "whom the Gods love die young." According to a current saying, "the good are taken too good to stay, the bad are spared too bad to take away." The early virtuous, the early fit for the blessedness of a higher state may be taken early to that higher state for their own sake, or they may be continued longer in life for the sake of others, to whom their life and example are needful for many purposes of good for this life and the life to come. With every life some other life has relations of interest or affection to which the continuance of that life may be indispensable. In truth, all lives are so intertwined and complicated one with another, that the continuance of one may be of importance to many, and the decease of one may be felt as a calamity to many. *For no one liveth to himself, and no one dieth to himself. And whether we live or die we are the Lord's;* and all are at the Divine disposal, and there comes to all *a time to die*, the fittest and the best, as God sees to be expedient and best for the one that is taken, and for the others that are left. And only God can see in all instances this expediency, this fitness.

We can occasionally see this expediency, this fitness in the death of individuals in all the various stages of life.

When the body or the mind is impaired and enfeebled, or disordered past all hope of recovery, or restoration to soundness, or to a capacity of enjoyment, or of improvement under the irreparable loss of physical or mental sanity, who does not see that death comes in mercy to the sufferer, and to all who suffer from sympathy with the sufferer. When from some deep and immedicable wound, the heart is slowly bleeding its life away, and the sufferer feels that sickness, which comes of hope deferred till it has become extinct,—when all that is beautiful and lovely in creation meets the eye with a faded aspect, and all that once gladdened and cheered the spirit ceases to please; when the frame, that was once vigorous, grows feeble and tremulous, the life-pulse beats languidly, desire fails, and existence is felt to be a burden,—the subject that has been long struggling, in secret it may be, with a hopeless heart-sickness like this, feels it indeed a mercy that a time is drawing near for him to die. I might illustrate this fitness of *a time to die* by a multitude of instances that have come under the notice of every observing person who has lived many years. So on the other hand, the same observer must have been struck and startled by the sudden and wholly unexpected death of many an individual, on whose continued life depended, as I have before remarked, interests, hopes, and an amount of good and happiness, that seem to have rendered his death most unseasonable, widely disastrous and especially calamitous to many, whose sun of hope and of earthly joy went down with the descent of the departed parent, lover, companion, patron and friend to the tomb.

When a man has passed the scriptural limits of life, dis-

tinguished from his early entrance upon the stage of active life by an earnest and persevering devotion to an honorable profession—by an unrelaxing energy, unswerving integrity and that diligence in business which are the infallible guarantees of success, when self-formed, and a hewer of his own way to fortune, his confiding fellow-citizens have transferred him from the counting room and exchange to the councils of the state and nation,—when, having experienced and witnessed most of all that life has to impart of interest in the diversified scenes, occurrences and changes, through which he has been called to pass;—when at length, retired from the agitating cares and interests of public life and of private business, after a peaceful interval of rest and declining strength, the infirmities and maladies incident to age, have brought with them wearisome days and nights of watchfulness and distress,—having survived most of his coevals—surrounded by strangers of a new generation—all those he has most known and loved best, gone before him,—was it not in mercy to him that *a time came* at last for him to die? Yes, I am sure, must be the response alike of the family and fellow-citizens of our recently deceased, widely known and respected townsman.

But, will this response be as readily given, when it is asked, if it were in mercy that *a time to die* came so unexpectedly to the Chief Magistrate of the nation? The many millions, who have been startled by the suddenness of the event, and whose mourning has been prompted, as much by their fears of the disastrous change of policy that may ensue, as by their high regard for the character of the man—will hardly view it as an act of mercy, that such *a time to die* should have been allotted to the strong and hale man of their choice, by the supreme arbiter of life and death.

And truly, to human view, in the present menacing attitude and treasonable movements in the southern sections of our Union, it would seem that the country never stood more in need, than in the present crisis, of the indomitable *known* energy, the clear judgment, the commanding authority, the prompt decision and action, which were eminently conspicuous traits in the character of the late President. Yet, if not to the nation, we may see that it was mercy to the man, that having received the highest rewards and honors for his public services, which the nation had to bestow, he has been placed beyond the possibility of forfeiting what he had gained of earthly distinction and renown,—that death has relieved him of the onerous load of responsibilities and cares, which was pressing heavily upon his naturally buoyant spirits,—that though most inopportune for the nation, as we may think, his death has been most opportune and happy for himself.

And how impressively has this event once more demonstrated to statesmen, to politicians, to all of us, “what shadows we are and what shadows we pursue.” Thus solemnly reminded, as we are, that the paths of glory and obscurity alike lead but to the grave,—assured, as we are, that virtue only will be crowned with immortal honor,—and since this is equally in the power of the highest and the lowest in condition, let all our aims and efforts be consecrated to virtuous ends. Let well-doing, good deeds, hallowed by good intentions, springing from our hearts purified by contrition and prayer, show that we seek a better portion, a higher reward than the praise of men,—than even the funeral eulogies of a nation—the final plaudit of the Judge of all, “*well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*”

OBITUARY NOTICES OF MR. SILSBEE.

From the Salem Gazette of July 16th.

Died, in this city, on the night of the 14th, Hon. NATHANIEL SILSBEE, aged 77 years 6 months, one of our oldest and most respected citizens—long known to the community in the leading ranks of our most distinguished merchants, and for many years engaged in various duties, in the higher grades of public life.

Mr Silsbee began his career soon after the breaking out of the French Revolution, and the general warfare in which all Europe became embroiled. A new field of enterprize was then thrown open to the active minds of our countrymen, exhausted and impoverished by the war, from which they had lately emerged, and eager to embrace the golden opportunities, which then presented. The beneficent effects of our new government began to be seen and felt in the protection of the industry and interests of our own citizens. This new state of things opened to us channels of business throughout the commercial world, which had been filled by others—and enabled us by our neutral position, wisely resolved on, and preserved by the Father of his country, and his co-patriot supporters, to carry on the trade of nations, driven from the ocean, by the naval superiority of their enemies.

At this favorable point of time, Mr. Silsbee having finished his term of service at one of our best private schools of instruction, under the Rev. Dr. Cutler, of Hamilton, and having abandoned the collegiate course for which he had been prepared, and been initiated into the forms of business and the knowledge of the counting room, he engaged in the employ of one of our most enterprising merchants, Hasket Derby, Esq., the leader of the vanguard of India adventure. At the age of eighteen, he embarked on the sea of fortune, as clerk of a merchant vessel. Very soon after he took the command, and before he arrived to

the age of 21, he sailed for the East Indies in a vessel, which at this day, would scarcely be deemed suitable for a coasting craft, uncoppered, without the improved nautical instruments and science, which now universally prevail, trusting only to his dead reckoning, his eyes, and his lead, not one on board having attained to the age of his majority.— Fearless, sagacious, adventurous, yet prudent, success almost uniformly crowned his efforts. Many of his voyages appear like the fictions of romance, compared with the quiet safety and regularity of the present time. The lawless violence of belligerents, and the jealousy and suspicions, which ever attend neutral commerce, called into exercise every power, which mental skill and physical strength could devise.

At an early age he was able to withdraw from the perils and hazards of the sea, with a fortune sufficiently ample to engage in the fascinating adventures of that period, under the agency of others, and enjoy the pleasures of domestic life, duely mixed with the cares of business.

In a Government of free institutions, every citizen is bound to lend his aid, when required, and the confidence which his correct principles and course of life had inspired, marked him, as a fit man, to serve the public. This preference he long withstood, but yielded at length to the solicitation of friends, and embarked in public life. He served successively as Representative in our State Legislature, as Member of Congress for six years, as State Senator, over which body he presided, and as Senator in Congress, for nine years, with honor to himself, and satisfaction to his constituents.

In all commercial questions, which presented themselves to the consideration of Congress, while a member of both houses, no man's opinion was more sought for, and more justly respected. His consistency, his high standard of morals and of honor, his uncompromising and unswerving integrity, secured him the confidence of all parties, while his experience and practical knowledge on all commercial subjects pointed him out, as a fit expositor on such occasions. Long, after his retirement, were his opinions sought for in this branch of legislation, on which, strange to say, in a country so essentially commercial, such defective representation has so generally prevailed.

As a citizen of his native place, no one has more willingly discharged

the claims, which society should make on its members. He has done honor to the pioneer class of merchant princes, reared and nurtured in the early days of the Republic, intelligent, adventurous, the carvers of their own fortunes. No man has been more respected by the community at large—hospitable and liberal, he has lived beloved and honored in the circle of his friends and family, and now, in a good old age, his duties conscientiously discharged, and his earthly frame worn out, “he quietly “sleeps with his fathers,” in the arms of his God.

From the National Intelligencer, of July 18th.

Though, considering his venerable age, it was a thing to be expected in the course of nature, we were struck with sorrow on hearing yesterday of the death of the Hon. NATHANIEL SILSBEE, of Salem, Massachusetts, as long ago as in 1817 a member of the House of Representatives of the United States, and afterwards, for a period of nine years, commencing with 1826, a Senator of the United States from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. In early life he had been a distinguished and prosperous merchant, and ever, during his long life, enjoyed the respect and confidence of his immediate fellow-citizens, and of all who, in the course of his service in Congress, had the pleasure to know him. He was a model Senator, (not to be an orator,) of sterling patriotism, and the soundest judgment. The same indeed may be said of him in every relation he held to his fellow beings. Passing by his relations of citizen, husband, father, nobody has a better right than we to declare how true a friend he was.

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